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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000304

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

AF/W FOR BOOTH  
AF/RA FOR BITTRICK  
OSD-ISA FOR TIDLER  
EUCOM FOR CAPT EWELL  
OFDA FOR MCCONNELL  
LAGOS FOR CG, GREANEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [EAID](#) [PREF](#) [SOCI](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: GON ASSISTANCE REQUEST IN WAKE OF LAGOS  
AMMUNITION DEPOT EXPLOSION

REF: A. LAGOS 189

[B](#). LAGOS 188

[C](#). LAGOS 227

[D](#). ABUJA 301

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

[1](#). (U) This is an urgent action request; see para 9.

[2](#). (SBU) SUMMARY: On January 30, Ambassador Jeter offered condolences to Minister of Defense Danjuma for the loss of life and property following explosions at the Ikeja Cantonment. Danjuma, giving his assessment after a visit to the site the day before, said most victims were children and that unexploded ordinance was the greatest immediate concern. Danjuma said the Federal Government has established a disaster relief fund and committee. 300m Naira was already dedicated to the fund and the committee had dispatched members to Lagos to begin formulating its report and recommendations. Danjuma was pleased a EUCOM EOD survey team had been requested, and was interested in additional support. The Ambassador made a request for disaster assistance and the immediate release of the USD25m from the Emergency Fund (Abuja 301). Embassy requests the inter-agency begin consideration of additional support, to include provision of OFR Phase III supplies remaining in Abuja. END SUMMARY.

[3](#). (SBU) Ambassador, accompanied by Defense Attache, Assistant Army Attache and PolMilOff, called on Minister of Defense Danjuma on January 30 to offer condolences on the loss of life in Lagos resulting from the explosion of the Ikeja Ammunition Depot. (NOTE: On January 27, the Ikeja Military Cantonment and Ammunition Depot exploded when large quantities of stored and aging ordinance accidentally detonated. The official death toll is now over 700, and more bodies are still being recovered. There was large-scale destruction of property for several kilometers surrounding the depot, which included residences, military barracks, small businesses, and factories. The explosions were felt for more than 20 kilometers from ground zero. END NOTE.)

[4](#). (SBU) Minister Danjuma thanked the Ambassador, noting that he had conducted an on-the-ground assessment the day before. It appeared that more people were killed than injured, and the death toll certainly would be several thousand. Danjuma said most of those killed were children; moreover, significant numbers of children were left parentless or separated from parents as a result of the explosion and ensuing chaos. Many buildings had collapsed and the reinforced windows in the international airport had been blown out (the international airport, however, remains open). Danjuma stated that over 400 bodies had been pulled from the Ikeja canal, and the recovery effort continued. Divers had been deployed to carry out the effort. Danjuma was concerned the canal would become contaminated, endangering the water supply. Unexploded ordinance was the most immediate concern.

[5](#). (SBU) The scale of supporting those now homeless and dispossessed would be significant, Danjuma stressed. To begin tackling this humanitarian challenge, the President had announced a Disaster Relief Fund, managed by a committee headed by the Secretary to the Government, Chief Ufot Ekaette. A Nigerian needs assessment was already ongoing and would be completed next week. At that time, Nigeria would make specific requests to its friends in the donor community.

The President had also announced the GON had allocated Naira 200 million (about USD1.4m) for the relief effort, supplemented by Naira 100 million (about USD875,000) from the Nigerian National Petroleum Commission (NNPC).

16. (SBU) DATT told the Minister that the Nigerian Army's Chief of Operations, General Jinadu, had sent a letter to him requesting explosive ordnance disposal support. DATT stated that in response, EUCOM planned to send a three-man EOD survey team in the next few days to assess the situation and decide the scope and magnitude of needs. (NOTE: Danjuma provided the DATT a twenty-page listing of ordnance stored at the depot, which included large quantities of munitions -- from small arms ammunition to large caliber artillery projectiles and powder charges, as well as engineering explosives. This comprehensive list will be provided to the EOD survey team. END NOTE.) Danjuma said he would instruct the Army to detail an officer to the team for the duration of their stay, and would make sure the team had easy entry to Nigeria. Danjuma also noted that the British also had been asked for EOD assistance. DATT said he would coordinate our efforts with his British counterparts.

17. (SBU) Danjuma asked what support was available from the United States. The DATT responded that provision of U.S. military support would depend on Nigeria's assessment and official requests, and the ability of the USG to provide assistance considering other worldwide commitments and funding. The Minister asked if Nigeria could publish U.S. assistance plans. The Ambassador cautioned Danjuma to wait, since we were uncertain of the kind and amount assistance that might be made available. We did not want to raise expectations that could not be met. Announcement of the deployment of the EUCOM EOD survey team, however, could be made.

18. (SBU) COMMENT: The disaster in Lagos resulted in significant death and dislocation. Thus, the Ambassador formally declared a disaster (septel) on January 31, and requested the immediate allocation of USD25,000 in emergency assistance. The most immediate concern is the prevention of additional injuries and deaths from unexploded ordnance. However, relief in the form of food, shelter and medical supplies is also needed. Lagos CG, PolOff and Assistant Army Attache plan a site visit for 31 January, and will provide additional details for assistance needs.

19. (SBU) The GON simply does not have the infrastructure and technical skills to manage a disaster of this scale. We believe they will need support in the areas of: explosive ordnance disposal and technical assistance; mortuary affairs; medical assistance; medical supplies; in-country clearance and evacuation of casualties; ground transportation; humanitarian assistance for refugees; logistic support to the Nigerian authorities; diver support; and, water purification.

110. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: Embassy requests the Department, working with sister agencies, begin to consider assistance of the types mentioned above. An immediate donation of the post-Operation Focus Relief excess supplies and equipment now being prepared for shipment to Sierra Leone (consisting mostly of supplies remaining from the FOB) would be an immediate and helpful gesture of support. The materiel includes: several containers of MRE rations; purified water; about 30 large tents; camp support equipment such as generators; six vehicles; concertina wire; office equipment; kitchen and cooking equipment. These supplies could be in Lagos within days, and would be of immediate use in feeding and sheltering people, transporting equipment, providing electricity, and cordoning dangerous areas. END ACTION REQUEST.  
Jeter